

The \$100,000,000 Phony Diamond

Being the True Story of the Discovery of Gold in Idaho

"DARN," said the foreman and went down on all fours, peering anxiously into the dusty recesses under the bureau. "Darn the luck, that's the second gone in under there in a week."

"Don't you ever find them?" queried his visitor, wondering at a man who could lose diamond studs with such monotonous regularity and be tempted to no more desperate profanity.

"Haven't had time yet, but some day I'm going to tell Chew Chung to sweep that corner out; Lord only knows what we'll find."

The foreman had rid himself of work clothes and work dirt and was fast coming to resemble the college bred white man he was. His hand was on another stud, a few more minutes and the jangle of the dinner bell would find him de rigueur, for there were ladies coming that night, ladies from back east, God's country, to be told wonderful tales of the Inferno of great wealth.

His visitor broke silence with a laugh.

"You were always a pretty good goer, even in the old days, but I didn't know the Last Chance paid so well that a mere foreman—got that 'mere' did you?—could lose diamond studs and not even bother raking out the pay dirt under a bureau to get them back."

"Phony, phony," grunted the other.

"Imitation, you mean?"

"Sure, I get 'em by the dozen on a card. It's a great—say," the foreman was tugging at one patent leather with grim face and set jaw. He was glad of a respite. "Say, did I ever tell you



A typical bunk house and headquarters of an Idaho gold camp.

By F. G. MOORHEAD

The foreman dug into his waistcoat pocket, extracted a ring and exhibited the sparkling gem.

"A carat and a half and it goes on her finger tonight if you'll engineer the others out of the way. That stone looks pretty big to a 'mere foreman,' even if the Last Chance does pay \$96,000 dividends each and every month of the year. What do you suppose a diamond a thousand times that size looked like to a couple of half-naked Injuns, without a cent to their name, who couldn't have raised the price of a drink if they'd been put to it for their lives?"

"But there it was, flickering and blazing and burning; white, red, topaz, every color of the rainbow and nobody near those two bucks, for hundreds of miles. Is it any wonder they fell down on their knees and dug their faces in the gravel and howled like coyotes, shaking with fear?"

"But even a scared Nez Perce can't howl always and by and by they took courage and looked up. Probably they'd imagined it all, there was nothing. First one buck took a squint out of the corner of one eye; then another; and the next thing the Idaho Panhandle saw was a couple of Nez Perce bucks, all their dignity and clothing thrown aside, running as a scared jackrabbit never ran."

"I don't know whether they stopped before they got over into California or not. I suppose they had to, to get a drink or catch their breath as they went over the mountains, but I always like to think of 'em running until they fell at the feet of Colonel Pierce, clutching his knees, imploring him to save them from the eye of the Evil Spirit, for that was what they were convinced the ball of fire was."

"You've heard of Colonel Pierce, Colonel E. D. Pierce; sailed around the horn, dug pay gravel in California long before Bret Harte learned his letters; knew every prospect from A to izzard, with a few extra thrown in?"

The Colonel and the Indians.

"THE colonel had made and squandered a dozen fortunes. It happened to be his broke day when the two Indians caught up with him, down in California. He kicked 'em loose from his shins and pretty soon got the facts. Then the bucks felt better. Ever notice how it relieves a man to tell his troubles to somebody else?"

"I wasn't there, but I've heard enough about old Colonel Pierce to know just what he did. He drew himself erect and cussed a few minutes, then tightened up his belt and looked at his faithful gun and rode away, with as debonair a wave of his hand to the camp followers as though he had been a crusader going to rescue the tomb. Something like a couple of thousand miles to traverse, a few thousand hostile Indians to pass, a few months of starvation and suffering, and then—what? A blazing ball of fire in the heavens seen by a couple of scared bucks. Say they bred men in those days. Here's to Colonel Pierce."

The whiskey spilled over as the men clinked their glass rims and threw the potions down; more work for Chew Chung when he got around to it.

The foreman wiped his lips appreciatively, took up the patent leather once more and eyed it apprehensively.

"That's the way Colonel Pierce set out," he concluded. "Gallant, debonair, care-free, in search of a great diamond imbedded in some mountain cliff, for that's what he believed it to be. Mile after mile as the hundreds reeled off he saw it and spent it; whiskey by the cask; grub that

Delmonico's never knew, so tempting to an epicure; wine, woman and song for every Argonaut on the coast.

"That's the way he set out to find the \$100,000,000 phony diamond. And what do you think was all he found?"

Before there could be a guess the foreman answered.

"Nothing but a fat, greasy Nez Perce squaw."

The shoe was on at last; there was a premonitory vibration in the vicinity of the dinner bell. In a minute the foreman was giving his hair a parting brush. She was nearing and as usual Chew Chung was not to be found.

"Continued in our next; come on, the girls are here."

The dinner was a success; the girls voted it so and she was radiant. The host was not to be found for an hour or more and she was gone, too, but the others did not bother. They had come out of the east, like the wise men of old, though they were far wiser now.

in that land of great distance and fabulous, hidden wealth. Out of the land which had sent them had come the fairest of the fair and they were doing them homage. Who cared for a host or a fellow guest? There were questions asked years before to be answered, stories to be told, before the party went on, tourists toward the westering sun.

It was almost time for the day shift to turn out when the two men turned in, leaving Chew Chung silently moving about the debris of the function.

"I'm out a diamond, but in a pearl without price," confessed the foreman, and hand met hand in congratulation.

"It wasn't—it wasn't a phony diamond?" asked the other with a laugh and the foreman chortled with glee, the taste of bliss sweet on his lips.

"Just for doing me a good turn and getting the others away I'll finish that yarn," he said, and kicking off the armor de rigueur he took up the narrative where the jangle had broken it off.

Squaw repays Colonel's kindness.

"I GUESS the colonel saw something in her to love, even if she was only a common squaw to every other man. It isn't everybody can pick a winner like I did. The colonel was gallant; he put his hand on his heart and lifting his hat, swept the sand with it as he bowed low before the Nez Perce squaw as though she were as pretty a white girl as there was in the land."

"It was the way of a man and the squaw was willing. It's to the Colonel's everlasting credit that he always treated her square. It makes me think of those lines of Kip's:

'But we lived on the square,

Like a true married pair,

An' I learned about women from 'er.'

That's what Colonel Pierce did; he learned about women from her; not only women, but gold, too.

"It was in '58 when the colonel hit the Nez Perce country in northern Idaho. He lived on the square for a couple of years and then the



Gold mining by placer process in Idaho.

the story of the \$100,000,000 diamond?"

"You mean the Cullinan?"

"No; and I don't mean the Koh-i-noor or the Naulahka or any other one you ever heard of. This story is about the most wonderful diamond no man ever saw, a \$100,000,000 diamond, and phony, phony all the way through."

"My boy, you're wild, you're off, way off; buck up, remember there are ladies coming."

"A phony diamond worth a hundred million dollars if it was worth a cent. Didn't I ever tell you about it? Well, pick up that pipe again and close your teeth over it, anything to get that open-mouthed stare of idiocy off your face, and listen; that's all you've got to do; maybe that shoe will swell up with pride when it hears the story and will go on easier. And now for the story."

A Marvelous Phony Diamond.

"A PHONY diamond as big as an irrigation watermelon was the cause of gold being discovered in Idaho. Think of it, man! Oro Fino, Oro Grande, Pierce City, Elk City, Elk Creek, Dixie, Florence, Murray, Eagle City and the Coeur d'Alenes! I'll raise the price, a hundred million's far too small. But no, we'll be on the safe side and, besides, no man ever saw the phony diamond, anyway."

"No man at all?"

"None but a couple of Nez Perce bucks and they were so scared they never looked a third time. They'd be running yet, only they came to the Pacific ocean and they've been dead fifty years. You see, it was this way."

The foreman held up the obstreperous patent leather, eyeing it disgustedly.

"Of all the dod-gasted, sons of a—"

"But the phony diamond!"

"Well, those two old Nez Perce bucks were jogging along home one night and what did they see, or think they saw, all of a sudden right up in the sky before them, but a great blazing ball of fire. My boy, look at that."



On the 600-foot level of one of Idaho's richest mines.

squaw put him next. She knew a square man and she loved him; who was more entitled to know the secret?

"By that time the Colonel had given up all hope of ever finding the big diamond in the cliff. He couldn't even locate pay gravel, though he rocked and rocked till his arms ached. That's when the squaw took pity on him."